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The Call for Leaders

BY CHARLOTTE C. WYCKOFF

THIS call is from the native Christian women of our Arcot Mission in India. Two, three, or four generations back, these women were Hindus, bound down and limited by Hindu custom and tradition. Now they are Christians and have the key to the entrance into a fuller and larger life. Some have had a high school education, many are teaching, nearly all are settled in homes of their own. Close by the church in each of our mission stations is a larger or smaller group of Christian homes. Miles away from the towns are other Christian homes,—poorer and more squalid,—in the dozens of Christian villages which are under our care. It is these women and these homes which represent one of our greatest responsibilities and constitute a strong call for leadership.

First, there is need of social leaders. When the Hindu woman becomes a Christian, she steps out of her social frame, as it were. The friends, the activities, and the many festivals which filled her life are given up, because of their close connection with the old religion. She becomes dependent upon her new friends and upon whatever the church has to offer. With the second and third generation of Christians this dependence is even greater. Thus far, the churches and the Mission have been so taken up with the intellectual and spiritual training that active social life has been neglected. Gradually the men are beginning to come together to form tennis clubs and other organizations, but the women are more or less left to employ their spare time in gossip. There is no external stimulus to exercise and recreation, unless an energetic station missionary provides it. For the school girls the taste of freedom of school life makes home seem all the duller by contrast while the groups of unmarried teachers in the towns and nurses in the hospitals also experience the lack of social activity and leadership. With them the day's round of hard work is followed by nothing more entertaining than idle talk.

The missionaries do what they can to provide social opportunities but their attempts are necessarily temporary and somewhat artificial. The Christian women of India must build up a new social order for themselves. Women of personality, inde-

pendence, and initiative are needed, who will batter against the wall of conservatism, self-centered-ness, and inertia, and break it down, creating healthy social atmosphere and activity in the Christian community.

This same leadership is needed to arouse India's Christian women to take some interest in community and national problems. They need to be shaken out of their deep ruts of habit. We missionaries are often shocked at the signs of persisting superstition and distrust among Christians. Only last week a Christian father and mother caused their only daughter's death by removing her from the hospital when she was very ill, and doubtless employing native medicine. Carelessness about infection and disease is as great among Christians as among Hindus. We need leadership to create public opinion and to educate it with regard to these important problems. Such matters as infant mortality, adulterated foods, etc., are also awaiting the attention of Christian women, and the Christian women are waiting to be wakened by the right leaders.

Intellectual and spiritual leadership can hardly be separated from social leadership, and yet certain phases are different. The majority of teachers in the mission schools have had the equivalent of a grammar school education (or less) with one or two years of very elementary teachers' training. Some of them do remarkably well, considering their limitations, and yet one is depressed by the general lack of life and inspiration in their teaching. The children of the Christian community grow intellectually into glib little mechanical parrots where such teaching is the only kind provided.

Then there is the more serious problem of moral teaching. We whose inheritance in itself has given us such stern standards of right and wrong, find it hard to understand how Christians can be so weak. We punish our school children severely for their facile lies,—and yet the fault is not theirs. They hear their parents and teachers lie, and deceit is glorified in their own Tamil literature. They can preach and talk against lying but actually to refrain from it seems almost beyond their strength. And so with other matters of moral habit. Teachers and mothers of strong enough moral fiber to live uprightly themselves must be trained to help their children to similar cleanliness and righteousness of life.

We also need teachers and mothers filled with the spirit of Christ and consecrated to the task of spreading His kingdom in this land. Such women will look upon their Christian birthright

not as a badge of superiority, but as a call to service. They must have a wider vision than their sisters, if they are to lead them.

And now the question arises,—where shall we get the leaders? Every friend of India is looking to the higher institutions of learning, where India's Christian girls are having the highest opportunities for study and training.

Two weeks ago I revisited my home of two years ago,—the Woman's Christian College in Madras. There, in beautiful gardens and spacious halls, ninety-four girls are being trained for future leadership. They are growing in vision as they study for the coveted degree. The eight splendid British, American, and Indian women who compose the staff are putting all their strength into helping character to develop among these girls of whom South India expects so much. Besides the steady daily work of lectures and classes, games and sports promote physical fitness, clubs of various sorts arouse initiative and executive ability, and sermons, lectures, conferences, and excursions open new vistas of thought. Even the least fit of these students must be, to some extent, a leader in her community later, and their influence can hardly be calculated. We have one of the graduates on the staff of our school this year. She is a quiet, simple girl, but in vision and character stands out from the rest. How we long for the day when women of such influence and clear sight shall be plentiful in the Christian communities! Then only can the Christian Church solve its own difficult problems and take its rightful place in the town and nation.

In Vellore the new Medical School is training another smaller group of girls to be leaders, particularly in the professional world. They have no primrose path before them, for the years of grinding hard study must be followed by years of discouraging battle against superstition, ignorance, and distrust. Once they have won a position of confidence, they will be able to serve the women of India in a way no foreign woman can do. It is India's Christian women doctors who must lead movements for better food, better care of babies, and similar progressive work for social betterment so familiar to us at home.

Last of all, we may humbly mention a smaller institution which hopes to do its share in the production of leaders,—namely our own new Girls' High School at Ranipettai. In the first place our school will serve as a stepping stone to the two colleges already mentioned. In India elementary and secondary education run along parallel lines which meet at no point. The girl who wishes a higher education must enter a high school in the lower classes

and begin early her study of English. So far only those in our mission with enough money to go to Madras to school have been able to hope for a higher education. Only with the opening of the upper high school classes in this school is the child of the poorest family in our Christian village community able to go through high school into college, provided she has sufficient mental ability.

But college education will long be confined to the picked few,—and so our Girls' High School must serve as a training school as well as a preparation for advanced study. The majority of the girls will end their school days when they leave our school. A large proportion will not even complete the high school course. Yet even these will take more or less of a leading place in the Christian community, and so we have a grave responsibility as well as an inspiring opportunity to train these girls. English books and games give them a new taste of freedom. How can that love of freedom be guided without breaking the necessary bounds that must limit it? School organizations and responsibilities train executive ability and leadership. How can we insure wisdom and moderation in the future use of these powers? School life teaches new ideas of hygienic living. How can these be made habit? School life brings new visions and high ideals. How can these be preserved in the confining life which must inevitably follow? School life teaches the right relationship between God and the individual. How can this be made so real that it will last throughout life?

These are some of the problems which face us at every turn. It is so easy to make the school days happy for the girls but to know how to make these happy days an actual preparation for definite conditions is the difficulty. But this is the task—to train the girls socially, morally, physically, spiritually, for life—and for this is the clarion call for leaders, equipped and prepared, to show the Christian ideals for noble living through a vital Christian experience.

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